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SUBJECT: LEBANON: REQUEST FOR REINSTATEMENT OF NESA UGRAD SEMESTER PROGRAM FOR LEBANON

¶1. Post urges the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to reverse its decision to cancel the one-semester option for the FY09 Near East and South Asia Undergraduate (NESA UGRAD) Exchange Program for students from Lebanon. Embassy Beirut understands that six NESA UGRAD students abandoned the program in fall 2008 and went into hiding in the United States. None of these students, however, came from Lebanon. Students from Lebanon should be judged on their own track record: on-time return rates for all Public Diplomacy programs. By punishing Lebanese students unnecessarily, Embassy Beirut's credibility among students and educational institutions is damaged and a unique opportunity to deserving undergraduates in Lebanon is denied.

¶2. Embassy Beirut already concluded the recruitment season. Whether during television interviews, university presentations or via text messaging, NESA UGRAD was promoted as a semester- or year-long program, with the semester option far more popular among undergraduates in Lebanon. Of our three year-long students currently in the United States, all are 2008 high school graduates who have yet to enter university in Lebanon.

¶3. Reducing the number of our participants from fourteen in FY08 to a mere three in FY09 renders NESA UGRAD virtually inconsequential. Lebanese students are trusted to go on six-week programs like the Fusion Arts Exchange or the year-long NESA UGRAD or Youth, Exchange and Study (YES) so a semester-long program is similar. Embassy Beirut does not want talented, motivated and rule-abiding students from Lebanon to lose out on the amazing opportunities that NESA UGRAD offers because of the poor behavior of participants from other countries.

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